STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 31 | Number 3 (Winter 1952) pps. 215-222

Tom Visits the Market

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ISSN 0003-4827

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By Jean Poage

That Iowa June morning Tom bounced right out of bed and into his T-shirt and jeans. While he tussled impatiently with shoe strings, he could hear Bill closing the gates after the cows, Dick greasing a tractor, and Daddy separating the milk. Along with these familiar morning sounds, mingled the odors of mother's bacon and eggs and hot muffins, and suddenly Tom knew he was hungry. Tossing his pajamas towards the nearest hook, he hurried down to breakfast. And all of the time he kept saying to himself, "Gee! This time tomorrow I'll be at the market—in the Chicago stockyards."

Today and tomorrow were to be big days for Tom. A long time ago, Tom's father had promised that when he was ten years old he could go along when the steers were shipped to market. The older boys had gone when they were ten, just as Grandpa Brooks had taken each of his sons when he was ten. For three generations on the Jasper county, Iowa, farm, going to market had been a peak in the life of a Brooks boy. Once that high point was reached, Tom was sure he would be grown up.

Breakfast was nearly over when Mr. Brooks briefed the family on the forenoon's work. "We've a lot to do this morning. I've ordered three trucks to be here shortly after noon, so mother, that means an early dinner. Bill, how about you getting a jag of straw to bed the trucks. Dick, nail up that loose board on the loading chute, and you better check over all of the gates and fences. These steers won't be easy to load. Wild Texas steers when we bought them, and a year of gentle handling has not tamed some of them. In a tight place, they go nuts. But say! They are beauties. Don't know when I've had a better herd of white faces. They should bring a good price. Maybe

we can afford that new combine and that deep freeze for you, mom."

Tom's face beamed with anticipation, "What's my job, dad?"

"You can help me, son. We'll give the steers all the hay they can eat this morning but we'll limit their water supply."

"No corn, dad? Won't they get hungry?"

"Well, you see we want these steers to be feeling tiptop, hungry and thirsty when they reach Chicago, and we want them to look good, too. Corn is a highly concentrated food, and since the steers are not accustomed to jostling about in a truck, they could easily get sick. The yard men will give them hay and water. This way our loss due to shrinkage will be less."

Mr. Brooks continued his instructions. "Later on, I'll need some help sorting. We must keep one home to butcher. Each semi will carry nineteen; so we will pick out fifty-seven to go. All set? Then every man to his job."

The forenoon slipped by quickly. Mr. Brooks and Tom came to the house awhile before dinner to clean up. Mother helped pack a bag containing the good clothes to be worn in Chicago. Mr. Brooks planned to wear what he called his scuff suit enroute and Tom was to wear a brand new pair of jeans and sweater.

Loading the Steers Into Trucks

At exactly 12:30 the three trucks roared into the farm yard. Bill backed his rack to the rear of each truck and spread the straw over the floor. Mr. Brooks always wanted his cattle to look clean on the market. Then the driver skilfully backed his semi to the loading chute and shut off the motor. The boys had a group of steers ready to pass through the scale house. Mr. Brooks was particular about weights, too. He frequently had weighed the steers, so he cound balance the amounts of corn, hay, silage and protein supplement in order to get the desired gain in weight. Now by subtracting today's weights from tomorrow's weights

in Chicago Mr. Brooks would know the amount of shrinkage.

The scale house door opened. Most of the steers bolted up the loading chute into the trucks. Others balked until touched with a rod containing a battery. Mr. Brooks signed bills of lading in duplicate, designating to which commission firm the cattle were to be delivered. Tom climbed into the first truck; his father into the third. They pulled for the road.

"One-thirty and we are off in good time," said Jones as he shifted into fourth gear. "With good going, we should be at the yards in twelve hours. You can help me, Tom, by keeping a sharp eye on the other two trucks. We should keep fairly close together."

Newton to Chicago, 321 miles

Grinnell to Chicago, 292 miles

Tom read the signs. He watched the countryside slip by. He listened to grinding gears. Jones, a veteran trucker, pointed out landmarks and told of many interesting experiences. Sometimes it was difficult to hear their voices over the roaring of the engine and Tom would just sit and think. Particularly did he think of how this trip was different from trips made by the earlier Brooks.

"Say, Jones, I betcha this road follows the old trail my Great Grandpa Brooks and his neighbors came over in the early '50s—from Ohio. Oxen pulled their wagons. They stopped at a home just east of Newton. The family must have been lonesome. 'Make camp here,' they said. 'Why go to Newton? Nothing there. Mud is hub-deep. Takes four horses to pull the dray'." In a proud voice Tom concluded, "Those pioneers brought a few chickens, a cow, and a hog or two. Soon they were marketing stock. Gee."

Iowa City to Chicago, 224 miles

Jones pointed out the University of Iowa, but Tom was deep in thought. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Iowa City! Why, my Grandpa drove stock to this town when he was a boy! The railroad ended here. This was the

shipping point to Chicago. How long have we been on the road?"

"I judge about three hours for the ninety-seven miles," replied Jones.

"Gee! Grandpa's outfit took five days anyway. Cattle foraged for their own food. Oxen pulled a chuck wagon ahead loaded with supplies for the fellows—a dozen or so men and boys. Some were on foot; others, horse-back. I'd like a trip like that."

"Would you like it, Tom, if the cattle were belly deep in dust?" To which Tom added, "Or belly deep in mud?" They both laughed and shook their heads.

Davenport to Chicago, 167 miles

Now they were crossing the Mississippi river. They were in Illinois. The afternoon wore on.

The Days of Shipping by Train

At six o'clock the drivers with Tom and Mr. Brooks were waiting for steaks to be served. Nearby a switch engine puffed billowing clouds of black smoke and shunted freight cars here and there. The latter began, "Hearing that freight train reminds me of my first trips to Chicago with stock. Any of you guys ever ride a freight? No? Then you have missed something." One man said, "I know cabooses to be mighty dingy, and drab and dirty." "And very, very drafty," put in another.

Mr. Brooks continued, "We sat on the old hard benches lining the walls, slept on them, too. Sometimes there were black oilcloth covered cushions and, man! but they were cold! Trainmen fared better than stockmen. They slept in berths lowered from the ceiling. We warmed ourselves around the pot-bellied stove, swapped yarns, and spat into the coalpail."

Jones chuckled, "They say old timers advised lying on benches with feet forward so that when the caboose lurched, one's feet took the rap and not the head. A broken leg was preferred to a broken neck. Tell us, Brooks, how were the cattle fed on the two day trip?"

"Freight cars had hay racks made by nailing slats

from ceiling to sides. The racks ran along both sides excepting for the big doors. Made a good bed, too, for tramps sneaking rides on the train. Half way up on both sides of the car were cast-iron watering troughs. They were filled from the outside."

Tom looked worried, "Wouldn't two days be pretty long for cattle to be penned up?"

"Well, yes, son. There was a law requiring the railroads to unload and feed the cattle after 36 hours. But the next freight might not be along for another day. Farmers didn't like that, because they wanted their cattle to reach a certain market, so they'd sign a 'release', which did release the railroad from their responsibility."

Soon the meal was over. Jones started for the cash register. "We better keep pushing."

Aurora to Chicago, 44 miles

Traffic grew heavier; four lane highways—sometimes six; intersections, one after another. Tom tried to look in all directions at once. He no longer read the signs —too many of them. Stock trucks pulling in from the side roads made a solid stream pushing toward the city. " Would the market be flooded?" thought Tom. "Would dad's check be big enough for the combine and the deep freeze?"

Chicago

At last! The bigness overwhelmed Tom. Houses appeared dreadfully bleak, and so many blocks of them reeling by made Tom almost dizzy. Cars whizzed past—hundreds of them. What would the city be like in daytime?

It was after midnight when the trucks came to a big gate at the Union stockyards. Gatekeepers checked the bills of lading and assigned unloading docks. Mr. Brooks was pleased with his cattle's appearance. The truckers went their way.

"Well, son, how do you feel?"

"My ears ring and my legs are wobbly, dad, but I am all right."

"I feel the same but a little sleep will fix us up. We will go over to the Stockmen's Inn for the rest of the night."

A bellhop escorted the two to a huge room holding about one-hundred cots. "Take your choice," he said. "I lock the door on the outside but you can leave any time you wish."

Tom stretched and slept.

The Mammouth Stockyards

In the morning, Mr. Brooks suggested that before going to the yards, they look down on them from the sixth floor of the commission building. What a view! Tom was speechless. Below, as far as he could see, there were pens—cattle pens; over there, sheep pens; and beyond hog pens. "Gosh! How big!" he exclaimed.

"We're looking over a square mile of pens—10,000 of them, son. The plans were drawn up in 1864. The yards were opened on Christmas Day of the next year. All of this ground was low— two feet below the river —and it took thirty one miles of sewer to convert the quagmire into decent yards. I'm told there are twenty-five miles of lanes in here and 300 miles of railroad track. Long trains roll in here all night long and especially in the morning."

"Gee, dad, it is so big! What are those red buildings?"

"Scale houses. From there do you see lanes leading to overhead runways? They go to the slaughter houses. Notice that some pens have roofs—for greater protection in bad weather. It costs extra but I think it pays. All pens have feed bunks—fifty miles of them—and watering troughs too."

"Where does the water come from?"

"From artesian wells 1200 feet deep. The supply filters in from below the bed of Lake Michigan. You will see signs down there, 'This water unfit for human consumption'."

Together, father and son enjoyed the colorful scene stretching before them. White clouds scudding across

blue sky; the weathered timbers and planks of the pens contrasting with the backs of the red Shorthorn, the black Angus, the roans, the brindles, the tawny, and the white faces. Herds were being shifted constantly up and down lanes by means of cut-off gates. The maze baffled Tom.

"Dad, do you have any idea where our steers are?"

Mr. Brooks pointed, "They will be in that block—it belongs to our commission firm. Let's hunt them up."

They worked their way through the lanes, being careful to close all gates. Once they had to do some quick climbing up the fence rails when drovers yelled, "Clear the lane—Longhorns are coming." Down here was yelling, trampling hoofs, and bellowing cattle. Whips cracked. Elevated trains thundered along overhead.

And so many people! Feeders like themselves, hunting their own stock, comparing herds and visiting; commission men, buying and selling; packing house agents; inspectors judging whether or not quality was satisfactory for slaughtering; workmen; pop and ice cream venders.

Tom was first to spot the steers. Proudly, Mr. Brooks introduced him to the commission man. "I brought along another third generation Brooks—my youngest son, Tom." They shook hands.

"What is the market doing today?" asked Mr. Brooks.

"Mostly steady. Better grades are selling strong to twenty-five cents higher. Buyers are looking for quality and finish. I've had several offers for yours. What do you think you ought to have?"

For the next two hours, Tom watched the sale of many pens of cattle. It was no easy matter to satisfy owners and buyers. One buyer on horseback scurried back to the Brooks pen repeatedly. Finally, Tom caught the commission man's quick glance toward dad, who nodded in return, and he was sure the deal was closed.

He rushed to his father. "Do we get the combine? Does mom get the deep freeze?"

"I think so, son."

The commission man paused, "That was a mighty fine bunch of white faces, Brooks. Keep them coming. Good luck." And then turning to Tom, "So long, young man. Some day we will be dealing with you."

"You betcha! Gee!" was all Tom could say.

Civil War Telegraphic Project

A St. John paper is authority for statement that this country is to be brought three days nearer Europe by partial use of telegraphy, saying:

"A project is maturing called the Cape Race Electric Telegraph and Light Company. Its object is to build and station a light ship near Cape Race to intercept American mail steamers. The light ship is to be 600 tons burthen, and fitted with 100 horse-power engines. When this ship is stationed, there will be less danger of making Cape Race, and will give three days' later news from America. It is intentioned to lay down a submarine electric cable from the ship to the land."—*Daily Iowa Statesman,* Des Moines, August 25, 1863.

A Lucky Iowa Educator

The first school in Iowa opened at Dubuque in 1833, according to conflicting claims, and was taught by George Cubbage, a great grandfather of Attorney Verlin W. Cubbage, of Des Moines. He was captured by the Indians, as the story goes, who promptly swapped him to a white trader for a plug of tobacco because he was bald and could not be scalped—a very lucky circumstance.